

Commentary by
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Many Americans were still trying to find Bosnia on a map when the 1st Armored Division rolled across the Sava River, Dec. 31, 1995.

First Armored Division soldiers, who know about sacrifice and the importance of adhering to high standards, knew their mission and what it would take to complete it, but for much of the American public the purpose of the deployment remained unclear.

Balkan is a Turkish word meaning rocky or stony, and is a fitting description of former Yugoslavia. Would the deployment become another Vietnam only with a different terrain or would it be the first step on the rocky road to freedom for the people of the Balkans?

Heated debate raged across the United States. Should America really be involved in a problem that was clearly defined by many as a responsibility of Europe? What is our national interest in that big pile of rocks — formerly known as Yugoslavia, was a question often posed. Some argued that we were snuffing the same sparks that had led to two world wars. Some said we had no economic interest. Some claimed a humanitarian angle. Some were soldiers in the 1st Armored Division.

Iron Soldiers continued their peace keeping mission while critics waged campaigns of dissent and proponents argued dissenters — both examples of the 1st Amendment right to freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech was one of the rights not possessed by the people of the Balkans. Freedom of speech was one of the rights not possessed by American colonists 225 years ago.

American patriots shed blood,

sweat and tears during the American Revolution for principles which were later laid down in the Bill of Rights and the United States Constitution — the same rights denied the people of the Balkans.

I joined the U.S. Army as a tanker May 24, 1994 while the possibility of a major deployment to the Balkans loomed on the horizon. I had requested to be stationed in Europe, hoping to be involved in something big, but the Army sent me to Fort Stewart, Ga.

I was greatly disappointed, but the craziest, most-wonderful thing happened to me. I received orders to be stationed in Europe only three weeks after I arrived at Fort Stewart. I arrived in Germany Oct. 12, 1995, only 80 days before 1AD crossed the Sava River. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, I did not deploy and was part of the rear detachment. I say fortunately because I witnessed many wonderful things while the arguments about the deployment lingered.

I saw American patriotism and its export firsthand.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines patriot as one who loves his country and supports its authority and interests.

Soldiers from 1st Armored Division left their friends and families behind to support our nation's interest, which included laying the foundation for a safe and secure environment on which the pillars of democracy could stand fast.

After a year in the Balkans, 1st Armored Division soldiers returned home. Tears of pain that fell a year before were only a precursor to the torrential downpour of joyous tears flowing down mountains of hugs for those separated by the deployment, but we haven't stopped sacrificing. It's an ongoing process.

Six years later, the pace hasn't changed much in 1st Armored Division. I have been deployed, changed jobs and

have seen many soldiers come and go. I have been in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo. I have seen the effect of our noncommissioned officers instructing the Croatian army.

I listened on the phone with my Kosovar-friend, Bujar, as his family was ousted from their home by Serbs during the NATO bombing campaign.

I have seen the effect of our patriotic export in the smiles of Balkan-children, the laughter of toothless, old men and the attempt of many to adopt those superficial customs and styles often associated with Americans, but most importantly, the attempt to emulate our freedom.

There is no utopia in the Balkans, but neither was there a perfect society after the birth of our nation. Although the Declaration of Independence signaled the birth of a new sort of nation to the world, we had to learn much about ourselves, and others before independence and freedom were truly achieved.

Six years later, we are ending another of many deployments in the Balkans; however there is no complacency in dealing with deployments for the American soldier or the family and friends. Each minute away from loved ones and each tear shed, are great sacrifices laid on the altar of freedom.

If there is one principle that our American patriots and their families can bring to the Balkans, it is that freedom takes work. And when that freedom is achieved, share it. Make the sacrifices, shed those tears and give those hugs, but above all, share freedom.

I find the sweetest irony in the fact that I serve in the 1st Armored Division, nicknamed "Old Ironsides" after the U.S.S. Constitution, the ship named for the document, which is the foundation of our government — our way of life.

Old Ironsides

hands over Task Force Falcon

Story by Spc. Joe Thompson
Photo by Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter
1st Armored Division PAO



CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — After a yearlong rotation in Kosovo, the 1st Armored Division relinquished command of the Multinational Brigade-East to the 101st Airborne Division June 1.

The transfer of authority ceremony held at Camp Bondsteel ended 1st Armored Division's year long deployment and 2nd Brigade's six-month tour in Kosovo, which was commanded by Brig. Gen. Kenneth Quinlan, Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver.

"Our multiple missions were accomplished with a quiet confidence, representative of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines with the task force," said Quinlan. "A superb training program in Germany, and a demanding mission rehearsal exercise, created a fit, disciplined, cohesive team, led by skilled and versatile leaders,

focused on excellence, capable of rapid deployment and decisive victory."

Under the leadership of Quinlan, Task Force Falcon soldiers have successfully patrolled hundreds of thousands of miles and pilots have flown over 6,000 hours. Over 500 soldiers from the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac, commonly known by the Albanian acronym UCPMB, have turned themselves in to Task Force Falcon. The Ground Security Zone, a border established by NATO in 1999 as a buffer zone between peacekeepers and Serb security forces, was returned to Serbian control. Tons of ammunition and weapons were confiscated, and thousands of pounds of clothing and food were distributed.

Brig. Gen. William David, 101st Airborne Division Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver, takes over the challenges of Task Force Falcon and MNB(E).

"I give you my solemn pledge that this team you see before you will do everything within its power to be

good teammates to everyone. Building upon the foundation so capably led by Brigadier General Ken Quinlan, Colonel Gene Kamena, and many others," said David at the transfer of authority ceremony. "We will do our best to advance the peace process and the rule of law, to make Kosovo a safe and secure environment for all its citizens."

The 1st Armored Division played a significant role in the changes in Kosovo.

"Ethnic intimidation has been drastically reduced, while grassroots interaction between Serbs and Albanians is occurring daily," said Quinlan. "We have also seen integration of Serbs into most municipal governments, as well as the strengthening bonds of trust between [United Nations Mission in Kosovo] and the Task Force. This sector is safer today because of the service members of Multinational Brigade-East."